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## FIRST-YEAR LATIN AND FIRST-YEAR GERMAN

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When Mr. Senger's article "A Comparison of the First-Year Courses in Latin and German" (May number of the *School Review*) was brought to my attention, my first thought was: "Well, no one but a teacher of the classics would have tried to make such a comparison, for only a teacher of Latin or Greek would hold to the opinion that learning a language is learning a certain number of facts." The modern teacher of modern languages realizes that teaching a language is not synonymous with drilling a certain number of facts into a pupil's head, although that is a well-defined part of the process. I presume there is some justice in Mr. Senger's comparison, but one will have to bear in mind throughout that oral work plays a much greater part in modern-language instruction than in the Latin or Greek class. We may compare the grammar work done in the German class with the grammar work of the Latin class, but we must at the same time be fully conscious of the fact that, whereas the instruction in grammar and the reading and translation of a text constitute the entire work of a Latin class, in a German class these are regarded merely as the foundation on which is to be built up a feeling for German and the ability to use simple German in the classroom in preparation for a fuller and more extended actual practical use of German in the following years.

Another fact to be borne in mind when one is reading the conclusions reached in the article is that one cannot conclude that more facts *are* actually learned in one language than in another even though there be more *to be learned*. In fact, if we consider the mentality of the pupil as a constant, it would stand to reason that the pupil learns as much in one five-hour course as in another, presupposing the teachers of equal power and skill, as we shall have to do in such a general case; or we might say, the greater the amount

of facts to be learned, the hazier will each individual fact be in the mind of the learner; or, in other words, if Latin has more facts to present, then the German will be learned more thoroughly. And that I believe is the case. The fewer facts which the modern-language course wisely offers the beginner can be mastered and put to actual use in speech in the foreign tongue.

So much by way of preface to establish a standpoint. But the German course is not so much easier than the Latin as Mr. Senger would have us believe, for I would call attention to the fact that Mr. Senger considers only the first twenty lessons in Kayser and Monteizer's (Monteser's?) *Foundations of German* and so entirely neglects the reading-lessons, which certainly present new material; i.e., he compares only a part of the German work with the whole of the Latin first year. Naturally no conclusive results can be reached by such a process. Hence his attempt is doomed to failure from the very start. No wonder he thinks he can so easily prove his point!

There is of necessity a great element of subjectivity in the whole article. This is shown very clearly in the manner in which he divides German and Latin words into those "strikingly similar to the English" and those not so. At the bottom of p. 303 he gives the list of German "nouns strikingly similar to the corresponding English words." I should like to submit the list to an American who has no knowledge of German and see how many he would be able to guess. I would take exception to *Fleisch*, *Eisen*, *Herbst*, *Schultag*, *Strasse*, *Dame*, *Weber*, *Weberei*, *Freiheit*, *Junge* ("boy"), *Heimat*, *Land* ("country"), *Mädchen*, *Christ* (Christian), *Neffe*, *Witwe*, *Studentenschaft*, *Dummheit*, *Häuschen*, *Mutterchen*, *Regen*, *Eltern*, *Durst*, *Antwort*, *Sprache*, *Glück* ("happiness"), *Unglück*, *Zucker*: 28 out of 100. Others are not quite the same as the nearest English word or not necessarily the same, e.g., *Limonade* does not necessarily mean what we understand by lemonade but is used (especially in the compound *Brauselimonade*) to mean a soft drink, pop. Say to a waiter in a restaurant in Germany: "Bringen Sie mir eine Limonade!" and he will ask: "Brauselimonade oder naturelle?" And if you say "Brauselimonade," he will ask: "Citronen—oder Himbeerlimonade?"

At the top of p. 304 Mr. Senger states that the student needs to learn only two facts about the words similar to the English. Why not three facts as for the Latin similar words on pp. 306-7? The very fact that the words are spelled differently in German than in English would make it seem necessary to devote some time to the nominative form in German as well as in Latin.

Under the German adjectives, I do not find any numerals,<sup>1</sup> whereas there are eighteen Latin numerals given on p. 307. I cannot say how many numerals there are in the German text read in the Woodward High School, but certainly there must be some. Again I do not find any German comparatives or superlatives, although the Latin list contains a number.

I would take exception to the remark: "The German adjectival declension is simple." For one who knows German it is, but with its variety of strong and weak endings the average American student finds it rather difficult, hence it does seem entitled to some consideration. But who shall say how much, if any, harder the German adjectival declension is than the Latin? On what scales can we weigh this difference? Why doesn't the student have to learn at least three facts about a German adjective if he has to learn three about the Latin adjective? Why?

The next list (beginning *alt*, *jung*, etc.) is dismissed with the remarks "nothing new here," "negligible for our count," and yet I cannot see how anyone who knows no German can correctly guess the meaning of *genug*, *Wohl*, *weiss*, *dumm* ("stupid"), *fruchtbar*, *trinkbar*, even though the others might be guessed (*mütterlich?*). But why treat this list differently from the Latin list on p. 307, where two facts are credited to each word? Why not 66 facts for these 33 German adjectives?

It is generous of the author to "disregard the fact that most of the [German] weak verbs are regular." Unfortunately he also disregards the fact that we ask the student to learn the auxiliary (*haben* or *sein*) with which the verb forms its compound tenses, i. e., *ist gekommen* and not simply *gekommen* for the past participle of *kommen*. There is also an important vowel change in the stem of several classes of strong verbs which seems entitled to consideration. Why not six facts then for the German verb?

<sup>1</sup> *Zwei* is mentioned on p. 305.

Again, I would question the list of verbs (bottom of p. 304) "whose meaning is evident from the English." To my mind it is a little bit far-fetched to maintain that the following are readily guessed (by the student ignorant of German) from the German form: *gehen, sprechen, brechen, antworten, fürchten*. And why not four or five facts about this list instead of merely three?

In the first list on p. 305 there would seem to be other facts to be learned about some of the words besides merely the word and its meaning. Some are declined, e.g., *ich, du, wer, der, jeder*, etc.

"The following 26 words" (second list on p. 305) are again "omitted from consideration." Why? *So*="thus," *wenn*="if," *mancher* and *solcher* have a declension with some tricks, *allerlei* is not like anything in English that I know of, *gestern* is not so closely similar to yesterday, *morgen*="tomorrow," *wann*="when?" i.e., in a question, *als* is used only with a past tense to denote a single definite act in past time and must not be put equal to English "as," *eben* differs from "even," *ausser* and *meistens* are not so easily guessed by one ignorant of German. On the basis of these criticisms—which might be extended to the Latin lists<sup>1</sup>—I maintain that the author cannot claim credence for the results of his comparison. I do not believe that any valid comparison can be made in the manner attempted by Mr. Senger, so I shall not try to show how the "puny Germany regiment of 967" could be made to grow. Merely bear in mind, please, that the German reading-lessons have not been considered at all, only the first twenty lessons in the grammar.

Exactly how the author has figured out his table of inflections on p. 309 (bottom) is not clear, for he does not state his method, but I would venture to suggest that quite a different showing might be made by a teacher of German. I confess I cannot see how Latin can have 7.92 times as many inflectional forms as the German, even in the matter considered in the first year.

As far as the syntax is concerned (p. 310), I confess that I am again in the dark, for the author has his own sources and his own

<sup>1</sup> A person entirely ignorant of Latin guessed correctly a number of the words included under the dissimilar Latin words. More subjectivity!

method of computation. Nevertheless, I would again venture to doubt the results obtained.

In conclusion, let me again emphasize the fact that instruction in modern languages has for its aim the developing of the living language within the pupil's mind until he can understand readily simple German (or French) and can make a simple but rational and idiomatic answer to a question in the foreign language. To my knowledge this is rarely attempted in the Latin in the public schools of America. Hence the great difficulties in comparing the work in the dead with that in the living languages.

Had the author unlimbered his guns and proceeded directly to his attack on the college-entrance requirements, we should all have been with him, but the little sortie against the Germans, his allies in the campaign for more liberal entrance conditions, has to be met. The pressure brought to bear on the modern-language instruction by college-entrance requirements is possibly almost as oppressive as in the Latin department. If the schools have to do a great amount of reading, they cannot give the necessary time to the oral work which is expected nowadays. The attitude of the colleges in striving to outdo one another in comprehensiveness of entrance requirements simply forces the preparatory schools to be superficial, to skim over the surface of things, to make a "splurge," as the saying goes. Until the high school is delivered from this thralldom, the average American will continue to suffer when compared to the product of a good European educational system.